Imagine Learning and K-3 Literacy

The Importance of Early Literacy Instruction

Preparation for learning to read begins early in children's lives as they acquire language and are exposed to printed material. Reading skills that are developed during preschool years build the foundation for future literacy development. Yet the reading readiness levels of preschool children vary greatly. While some children enter school prepared to learn to read, many others lack the skills and experiences necessary for reading success (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

There is a clear correlation between prior literacy knowledge and reading achievement in future grades. In fact, "research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy before they arrive at school, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading" (National Research Council, 2000, p. 8). During students' early years, family environment drastically affects vocabulary and reading comprehension development, which can impact reading success in future grades. Because these early years are so crucial to students' literacy development, effective early literacy instruction delivered through preschool and other programs is essential to ensuring reading success for all students (National Research Council, 2000).

Effective Early Literacy Instruction

According to the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), interventions that have been shown to improve early literacy incorporate the following instructional strategies:

- Code-focused interventions, including phonological awareness instruction
- Shared-reading interventions
- Parent and home programs
- Language-enhancement interventions

Imagine Learning™ is an interactive software program that builds the foundation for successful reading by teaching essential early literacy skills. This comprehensive program incorporates all four instructional strategies outlined by the National Early Literacy Panel. The following sections describe how Imagine Learning uses those instructional strategies to help young students build a foundation for literacy by developing key reading skills.

Code-Focused Interventions

Code-focused interventions help students develop critical early literacy skills by teaching aspects of the alphabetic principle, including phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and early decoding skills (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Imagine Learning is a code-focused intervention that delivers instruction in these key areas through engaging literacy activities.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness, or the ability to perceive the sound units of words, is a critical component of effective early literacy instruction. Research shows that phonological awareness is critical for reading success; children who struggle with reading often have a poorly developed ability to differentiate sounds in words (Neuman and Dickinson, 2011). The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) indicates that phonological awareness training typically involves teaching children to both identify and manipulate the sounds in words.

Imagine Learning uses sequenced instruction and interactive phonological awareness activities to help students develop these essential literacy skills (see Table 1). Students are introduced to phonological awareness through activities that teach the concept of rhyme. Other activities teach young learners how to

segment words into phonemes and determine whether a specific sound is a frontal, medial, or final phoneme. Through this explicit, sequenced instruction, students build a foundation for literacy by developing phonological awareness skills.

Table 1: Phonological Awareness Activities

Sample Activity	Instruction
"Introduction to Rhyme" 	Students listen to spoken rhyming words, and then they learn the principles of rhyme. Students click pictures to hear rhyming words like *cat*, *hat*, and *mat* said aloud.
"Find the Phoneme" 	Students listen for a target phoneme in a one-syllable word. Then they identify the position of that phoneme in a target word.

Alphabet Knowledge

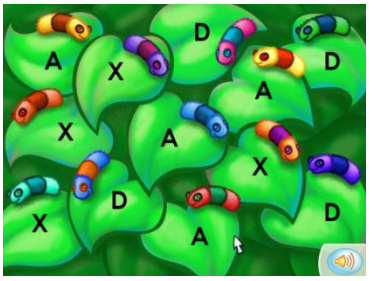
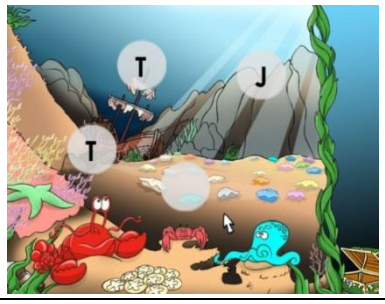
Before learning to read, students must learn letter names, sounds, and shapes. Researchers Treiman and Bourassa (as cited in Neuman and Dickinson, 2011) note that this is a crucial component of literacy development. Letter-name skills promote letter-sound knowledge, which is directly related to the development of phonemic awareness, decoding, and word recognition skills. Further, "there exists a wealth of evidence that the speed and accuracy with which young readers can recognize individual letters is a critical determinant of their reading proficiency and future growth" (Adams, 1994, p. 112). Developing letter recognition automaticity, or the ability to quickly and accurately recognize letters, is an important component of effective early literacy instruction.

Imagine Learning helps student master the names and sounds of all letters, both capital and lowercase, by providing explicit instruction in alphabet knowledge. The program offers 11 activities for each letter of the alphabet and provides instruction in letter names, sounds, and shapes (see Table 2). In the activity "Letter Shapes and Sounds," students learn about letters through a multi-sensory experience that draws on auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning opportunities. First, students learn the name, sound, and shape of a new letter. Then they practice tracing the letter shape with their finger as they say the sound out loud. Finally, the letter is presented as part of a word, and students are taught that the word shown starts with the letter sound they just learned. After multiple exposures to the letter name, sound, and shape, students practice identifying the target letter and discriminating it from other letters. For additional practice and reinforcement of learning, a letter worksheet is automatically printed after students complete this activity.

Imagine Learning also uses repetition in activities like "Recognize Letters" and "Free the Aliens" to help students develop letter recognition automaticity (see Table 2). For example, in "Recognize Letters," students review previously learned letters and practice identifying them correctly. After a letter is reviewed, students use the mouse to click examples of the letter on the screen. Students have many

opportunities to correctly identify the letter. If they make a mistake they are told the name of the incorrect letter they selected and are prompted to try again. Additional activities such as "Free the Aliens" and "Underwater Adventure" provide opportunities for students to practice rapid identification of letters in engaging, game-like settings. Each of these letter recognition activities use embedded assessments to help teachers quickly identify a student's level of proficiency with both capital and lowercase letters.

Table 2: Alphabet Knowledge Activities

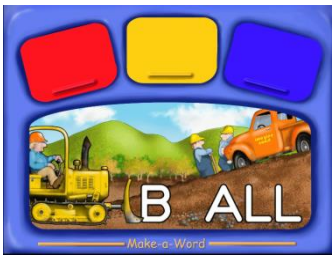
Sample Activity	Instruction
"Letter Shapes & Sounds" 	Students learn about letter shapes and sounds by hearing the name of a letter, tracing the letter shape on the screen, and identifying the target letter by distinguishing it from similarly shaped letters. At the end of the activity, a worksheet is automatically printed, and students practice writing the newly learned letter on their own.
"Recognize Letters" 	Students develop letter recognition automaticity by identifying and selecting the correct letter from among similarly shaped letters.
"Free the Aliens" 	Students practice recognizing letters quickly, racing against a timer to correctly identify letters and free as many aliens as possible. Students score points by quickly and correctly clicking the target letter.
"Underwater Adventure" 	Letter bubbles appear and quickly float upward off the screen. Students practice letter recognition by clicking a target letter before it floats away. When students click the correct target letter, the treasure chest fills with treasure.

Early Decoding Skills

According to the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), instruction in early decoding skills involves "teaching children about letters and simple decoding tasks involving the use of letter sounds" (p. 108). These decoding skills are an essential component of early literacy development. Research confirms that a combination of phonological awareness training and systematic phonics instruction can improve young students' early reading achievement (Neuman and Dickinson, 2011).

Imagine Learning helps students master early decoding skills through engaging activities that blend phonological awareness and phonics instruction (see Table 3). Activities like "Blend Word Parts" and "Meet the Phoneme" help students learn to segment and blend phonemes, preparing them to be successful readers.

Table 3: Early Decoding Skills Activities

Sample Activity	Instruction
"Blend Word Parts" 	Students practice blending onsets and rimes to make words.
"Meet the Phoneme" 	Students practice recognizing phonemes by segmenting the initial sound and selecting pictures of objects that begin with the target phoneme. They are shown a mouth model and are encouraged to repeat the target sounds.

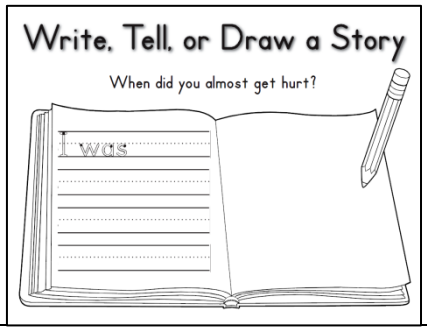
Shared-Reading Interventions

Shared-reading practices such as parents reading books with their children or teachers sharing good literature with their students are widely known to promote literacy development. According to the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), "shared-reading activities are often recommended as the single most important thing adults can do to promote the emergent literacy skills of young children" (p. 153). In fact, shared reading can facilitate the development of key early literacy skills that contribute to later success in reading (Neuman and Dickinson, 2011).

Imagine Learning provides many opportunities for shared-reading experiences. Through interactive activities like "Listen to a Story," students can hear and see books read out loud—much like they would in a shared reading experience at home or during story time with their teachers (see Table 4). Before the books are read in "Listen to a Story," the narrator introduces new words and phrases that will be encountered during reading. The new words and phrases are shown on the screen as the narrator explains their meaning. Students participate in reading by clicking to turn the page, so they can move through the

story at their own pace. Students can also click any word in the story to hear it said again. Additional activities ask students to practice putting story events in order. Since reading comprehension is "a later-developing manifestation of reading and writing," these types of activities build the experience base necessary for future reading comprehension skills (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008, p. vii).

Table 4: Shared-Reading Activities

Sample Activity	Instruction
"Listen to a Story" 	The narrator explains vocabulary (predictable text) before a book is read. Print concepts, such as left-right directionality and matching spoken words to printed text, are taught through sync-highlighted text and clickable pages. Students can click words within each story to hear them segmented into individual phonemes and blended back together.
"Sequence Story Events" 	Students listen to a story and are given pictures from the story to sequence. Natural text and carefully designed graphics make the stories comprehensible. Students can click any word to hear it spoken or move the cursor over pictures to hear the name of the item illustrated. They can also click a button to hear the text again.
"Printout: Sequence Story Events" 	Students complete a worksheet on which they retell a story based on a sequence of printed pictures. Then they draw, write, or tell about personal experiences related to stories they have heard.

Parental and Home Programs

While parental involvement is a necessary and important component of education at all levels, it is especially important in the early years**.** Research indicates that supportive parental involvement can boost children's early literacy development (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Effective parental

involvement includes promoting parent-child book reading, encouraging parent-child literacy activities, and equipping parents with the skills and strategies to foster their child's language and literacy development (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Imagine Learning makes it easy for educators to communicate with parents by first providing parent letters that describe Imagine Learning. This letter also describes ways parents can help continue their child's literacy education at home. As students begin using the program, parents stay updated on student progress through home connection reports. These reports can be printed in more than a dozen home languages. Reports itemize students' accomplishments and offer reminders of which skills students should practice and review at home (see Figure 1).

The program also provides teachers with offline, skill-correlated worksheets and materials (see Figure 2) that can be sent home to help parents support student learning. In some schools, parents are invited to come to school and work on the program with their students. This helps parents understand how the program works and how it improves academic performance. All of these strategies strengthen the home-school relationship that is crucial to boosting student achievement.

Figure 1: Parent Reports

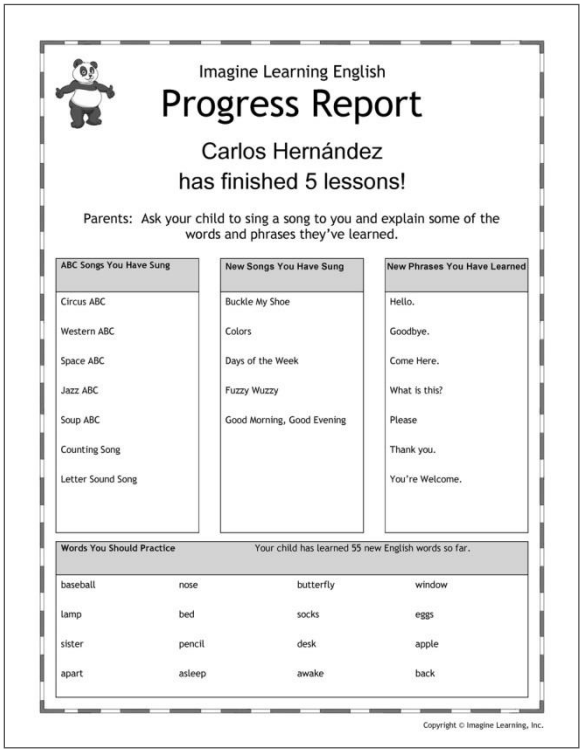
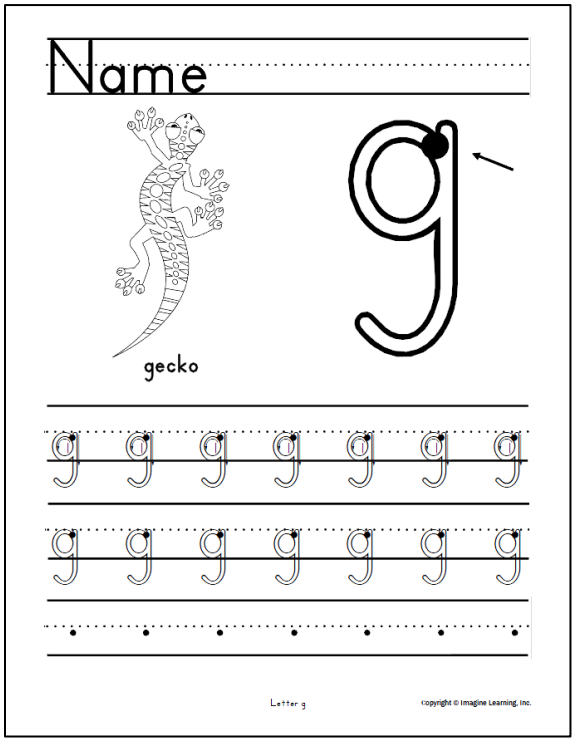
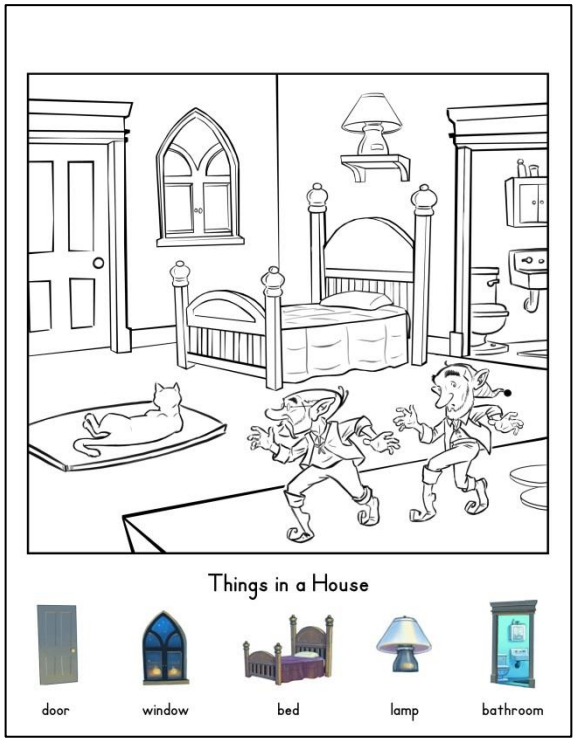


Figure 2: Offline Worksheets





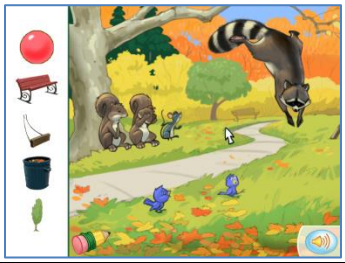
Language-Enhancement Interventions

Numerous studies demonstrate that interventions designed to improve language development are an essential component of early literacy instruction (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Research suggests that effective language development instruction includes explicit vocabulary instruction followed by opportunities to read or use new words in context (Neuman and Dickinson, 2011).

Imagine Learning focuses on language development and directly teaches more than 1,300 vocabulary words. These nouns, adjectives, and verbs were carefully selected from research by Paynter, Bordrova, and Dota (2005) and Marzano and Pickering (2005), as well as items from various state tests, the *AWL* world list, and other sources. Imagine Learning teaches vocabulary in context, building a bridge between words and real-world experiences to help students retain new words and integrate them into their vocabulary. Further, a multi-sensory instructional approach helps students build vocabulary as they hear, see, and say new words. Engaging activities, including songs and chants, foster language development and provide multiple opportunities for students to not only recognize and learn new words but also apply vocabulary in context. This method of instruction adds meaning and supports retention of key vocabulary that is critical for emergent readers (see Table 5).

Student progress is monitored and teachers can access detailed reports that list mastered and unmastered vocabulary words. This data enables teachers to uniquely tailor classroom instruction to meet students' individual needs. The program also provides additional vocabulary worksheets that can be used to extend learning opportunities as needed, as well as parent reports that list vocabulary words for parents to practice with their students at home.

Table 5: Vocabulary Activities

Sample Activity	Instruction
"Everyday Words in Scenes" 	Students learn nouns in categories such as family members, animals, and things that go. Students use visual, audio, and tactile modalities in this activity as they move each graphic into a puzzle. The vocabulary words come from kindergarten curricula and the academic language of school.
"Explore Everyday Words" 	Students practice using newly learned vocabulary by clicking a picture that illustrates the word, hearing the target word spoken, and dragging the pictures to create their own scene.
"Silly Animals: Matching Game" 	Students practice recognizing learned adjectives and verbs in a game that gives them a well-rounded understanding of each word. They match a spoken adjective or verb to two pictures that illustrate the target word. After they answer correctly, students listen to the target word used in a sentence.

Research Base of Curriculum and Instruction

Imagine Learning is appropriate as a literacy instructional support program for grades K–3. This is evident through the research behind the program's curriculum and instructional practices and through the success K–3 students have found by using Imagine Learning.

Imagine Learning program consists of more than 3,000 activities, 6,000 videos, and hundreds of hours of content all built on proven research and strategies specific to teaching K–3 students literacy skills. For example, the curriculum focuses on the five areas of literacy as outlined by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. See below for an explanation of how Imagine Learning supports each key area of literacy and a sample of the research Imagine Learning uses to create that curriculum.

***Phonemic Awareness*:** Phonemic awareness is taught in many engaging activities. Students learn letter-sound correspondence and how to recognize, blend, and segment phonemes. English learners learn various English phonemes that do not exist in their first language. They are given many examples and learn proper pronunciation through a video of a mouth model.

Research:

Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

August, D. (2003). *Supporting the development of English literacy in English language learners: Key issues and promising practices*. Baltimore: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.

Ehri, L. C., & Nunes, S. R. (2002). The role of phonemic awareness in learning to read. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 110–139). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Ehri, L. C. & Roberts, T. The roots of learning to read and write: Acquisition of letters and phonemic awareness. In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* (pp. 113–131). New York: Guilford Press.

Activity Name	Screen Shot	Description
"Meet the Phoneme"		Students practice recognizing phonemes by segmenting the initial sound and selecting pictures of objects that begin with the target phoneme.
"Introduction to Rhyme"		Students are directly taught the concept of rhyme. Students listen to spoken rhyming words, and then they learn the principles of rhyme. Students click pictures to hear rhyming words like *cat*, *hat*, and *mat* said aloud.
Sound Chase: Phoneme Segmentation		Students are tested on their ability to segment phonemes. If students do not pass the assessment, they receive additional instruction and opportunities for practice.

Phonics and Spelling: *S*tudents learn important phonics skills, including letter/sound recognition and word recognition. The program is carefully designed to follow the most current and confirmed research regarding instruction sequence. For example, when introducing letters and sounds, the program teaches the most frequently used letters first. There are also activities that teach grammar basics, patterns, and spelling and give students the opportunity to apply what they learned.

Sample Research:

Blevins, W. (1998). *Phonics from A to Z: A practical guide.* New York: Scholastic Professional Books.

Stahl, S. A., Duffy-Hester, A. M., & Stahl, K. A. (1998). Everything you wanted to know about phonics (but were afraid to ask). *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33(3), 338–360.

Gersten, R Baker, S.K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and

Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides.

Activity Name	Screen Shot	Description
"Space Ace: Word Identification"		Students learn to read and understand more than 400 decodable and key words presented in context sentences. The meaning and associated sounds are taught for each word. Students follow instructions with multiple steps to blend letter sounds to make a word, choose the correct way to say the word, and click a special button to hear a phonics rule. Each context sentence is used in a book the students will read.
"Get a Clue: Word Families"		Students learn high-utility phonogram patterns. They learn clue words that contain common endings and sort words by their endings. Students assemble initial sounds and phonogram patterns, spelling the word in response to a prompt.
"Spell Ball Showdown"		Students demonstrate their knowledge of phonograms or word families to spell words.
Ready to Spell Regular Words: Ready to Spell		Students learn to use word family patterns to help them spell regularly spelled words.
Spell Regular Words: Spell Ball		Students practice what they have learned by playing a timed spelling game.

"Word Chop: Introduction to Prefixes and Suffixes"		Students learn that there are important word parts called affixes that can be added to the beginning or to the end of a word. A strategy is outlined for attacking big words: (1) realize you don't know the word, (2) chop the word into parts, (3) determine what each part means, (4) check the context. Additional activities, "Fix It Up," and "Affix Action" help students recognize words with prefixes and suffixes.

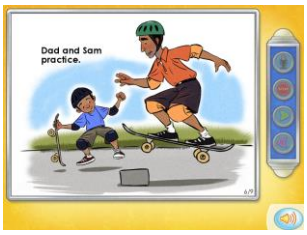
Fluency: Fluency is developed through word-recognition games that help students build automaticity as well as through echo reading. Students build word recognition speed by identifying a word multiple times in introductory activities, timed games, and assessments. They record beginning books with the aid of a fluent model, echo reading with the model and comparing their recordings for self-correction and teacher review. In this way, students develop accuracy and expression. The books range in difficulty from simple decodable texts to more complex natural texts. Content areas include science, social studies, literary genres, and math. Students also encounter literary genres such as myths, plays, poems, biographies, narratives, and tall tales. Selections are paired; one text provides background knowledge for the other.

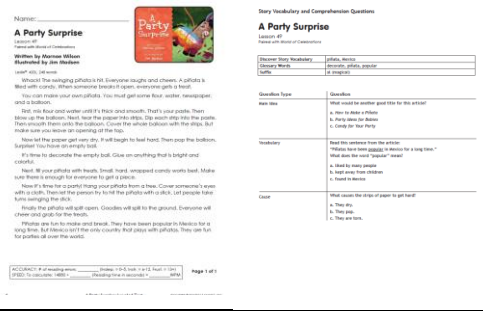
Sample Research:

Hudson, R. F., Lane, H. B., & Pullen, P.C. (2005). Reading fluency assessment and instruction: What, why, and how? *The Reading Teacher*, 58(8), 702–714.

Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. A. (2000). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices. *CIERA Report No. 2-008*.

Samuels, S.J. (2002). Reading fluency: Its development and assessment. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp.166–183). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Activity Name	Screen Shot	Description
"Read Leveled Text: Read and Record"		Students practice fluency as they read and record a leveled selection. Selections are paired; one story provides background knowledge for the other. Leveled selections also come in two reading levels—a simpler text and a more advanced text. Students encounter the text at their appropriate reading level. Students read narratives and genre texts such as a myth and a play. They also read nonfiction, including biographies and expository texts that teach content from math, science, and social studies.
"Beginning Books: Listen and Read"		Students practice decoding by reading simplified text. Each book is read three times: reading along with a fluent reader, identifying new words on a page, and finally recording the entire book and playing back their recording. Teachers can listen to student recordings at any time.

"Printout: Leveled Text" 	Students build fluency by reading a printout of a selection with a partner. This printout accompanies the activity "Read Leveled Text: Read and Record."

Comprehension*:* Students learn comprehension strategies and practice these skills in hundreds of activities. They answer questions involving strategies like compare and contrast, author's purpose, prediction, and drawing inferences. If students answer comprehension questions incorrectly, they receive immediate, instructive feedback further explaining the concept or referring the student back to a page in the text. Comprehension questions are similar to questions encountered on state tests. Students also learn important skills that assist in test taking, such as how to answer intuitive and literal questions.

Research:

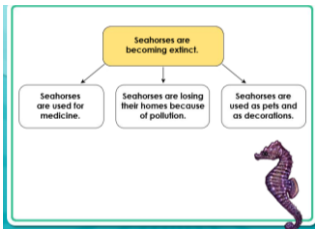
Biemiller, A. (1999). *Estimating vocabulary growth for ESL children with and without listening comprehension instruction*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec.

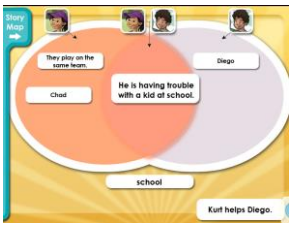
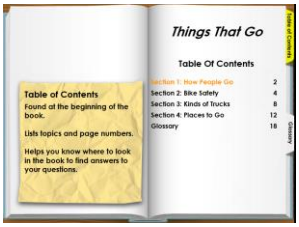
Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 205–242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Proctor, C. P., Carlo, M., August, D., & Snow, C. (2005). Native Spanish-speaking children reading in English: Toward a model of comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(2), 246–256.

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: A practice guide* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from whatworks.ed.gov/publications/practiceguides.

Snow, C. E., & Kim, Y. (2007). Large Problem Spaces: The Challenge of Vocabulary for English Language Learners. In *Vocabulary Acquisition*: *Implications for Reading Comprehension*, Edited by Wagener, R. K., Muse, A. E. & Tannenbaum: The Guilford Press.

Activity Name	Screen Shot	Description
Introduction to Main Idea: What's the Point?		Students learn about main idea and supporting details. Then they apply their knowledge to answer comprehension questions.

"Look and Think: Introduction to Inferential Questions"		Students learn how to combine clues in the book with their own knowledge to draw the correct inference.
"Map It Out: Introduction to Story Map Questions"		Students learn how to map a story by identifying characters, setting, problem, and solution.
"Story Circles: Compare and Contrast"		After reading two texts, students complete a compare and contrast Venn Diagram by dragging words and phrases into the story circles. They can refer back to the text to find the answers.
"Text Explorer: Introduction to Text Features"		Students learn how to use text features to aid in comprehending informational text.
Beginning Books Comprehension: Understand What I Read		Students answer literal and inferential questions about the story they have listened to and read. Students receive feedback in their first language specifying how to use question answering strategies.

Vocabulary: **S**tudents learn new reading vocabulary words prior to reading, during reading, and after reading. Students not only listen to a definition but they learn to distinguish between examples and non-examples of the word as well as identify the appropriate context for the word. While reading a text, students can click glossary words for a quick definition. After reading, they answer a vocabulary question. In addition, students develop basic and academic vocabulary skills through explicit instruction. This instruction includes real-life contexts and multiple mediums, such as videos and text. The program teaches more than 800 cross-curricular words and reinforces these words 8–12 times. These words are specifically chosen to help students succeed in school and on tests. With Imagine Learning, students encounter many activities that teach vocabulary as well as vocabulary-enriching skills like identifying antonyms, synonyms, homographs, and prefixes.

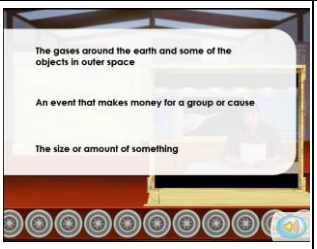
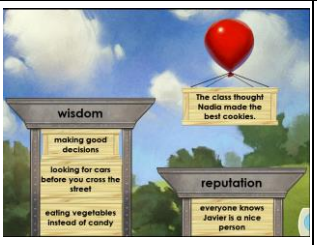
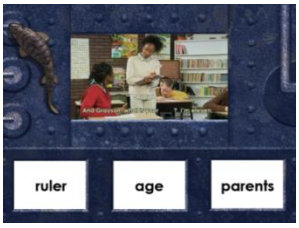
Research:

Cunningham, P. M. (2009). *What really matters in vocabulary: Research-based practices across the curriculum*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

McKeown, M. G., & Beck, I. S. (1988). Learning vocabulary: Different ways for different goals. *Remedial and Special Education*, 9(1), 42–52.

Nation, I.S.P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

———. (2005). Teaching and learning vocabulary. *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning.* Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.

Activity Name	Screen Shot	Description
Vocabulary Introduction: Word Warehouse		Students derive the meaning of critical reading vocabulary words by watching videos of peers using the words in authentic contexts.
Vocabulary Practice: Match It Up		Students engage in a sorting activity to practice their newly acquired reading vocabulary.
"Show What You Know: Vocabulary Test"		Students demonstrate understanding of new academic vocabulary by completing a cloze sentence. Each sentence is illustrated by a new video context.
Read-Alongs		Students follow along with a narrator as he/she reads narratives and nonfiction texts. Each word is highlighted as it is spoken. Front-loaded vocabulary acts as scaffolding and helps students comprehend what they read. Students must listen attentively to answer comprehension questions at the end of the selection.
My Word Book		Students review learned words as the words are placed into categories in their word book.

"Cool Cars: Noun Game"		Students are taught academic vocabulary words, including several words relating to math.
"Name That Word: Vocabulary Review"		Students demonstrate their knowledge of academic vocabulary, including many words relating to math. They try to use the fewest number of clues to identify the correct word to complete a sentence. They earn more points for identifying with fewer clues.

Please see below for key instructional strategies used by Imagine Learning that are proven by educational experts to be effective for students in grades K–3.

Key Instructional Strategies for K-3		
Practices	**Research**	**Imagine Learning Support**
Build Emergent Literacy with Code-Focused instruction	According to the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), also summarized in the introductory teacher guide, "What Works" by the National Center for Family Literacy: emerging readers develop critical early literacy skills by code-focused instruction, print awareness, oral language, and shared reading. Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) recommend that lessons for emergent readers "provide explicit instruction and practice with sound structures that lead to phonemic awareness, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, 'sight' recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud" (p. 10). According to Burns et al. (1999), "children who have a greater degree of phonological awareness when they enter school are better equipped to learn to read" (p. 46). They explain that "songs and rhyming games are excellent ways to spark children's awareness of language and sounds" (p. 21). Emergent readers "need intensive opportunities to read, each and every day, meaningful and engaging texts, both aloud with others and independently" (Burns et al., 1999, p. 88).	Imagine Learning combines explicit instruction with engaging practice activities to help emergent readers develop into strong readers. Phonemic awareness activities teach both phonemes and beginning decoding skills. Additionally, students build print awareness by learning the letter names and seeing how print works as they listen to stories. Their alphabet knowledge is solidified by singing ABC songs, tracing and printing each letter, and playing letter games. Imagine Learning provides both modeling and opportunities to read independently. Stories are read to students with sync-highlighted text to acclimatize students to print concepts and to encourage students to follow along. Interactive illustrations build understanding as students click pictures to hear the illustrations described. A wide selection of books ranging from decodable to leveled texts provides students with many reading experiences.
Direct,	Students must develop an extensive	Imagine Learning provides students with

Key Instructional Strategies for K-3		
Practices	Research	Imagine Learning Support
Comprehensive Reading Instruction	vocabulary, achieve oral proficiency, and acquire many more skills in order to gain reading proficiency. For students working to master these tasks and gain English proficiency, explicit—or direct—instruction is most effective (August, 2003). Direct instruction involves clearly identifying the concept being taught, and then applying that concept through guided and independent practice. As students learn, they are reminded of how practice connects to the target concept. Direct instruction in areas like vocabulary can enhance reading development. For example, the National Reading Panel (2000) recommends that students receive direct instruction in vocabulary items that will be encountered in an upcoming text.	systematic and explicit instruction in the five key areas of literacy as outlined by the National Reading Panel: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. To help students develop reading fluency, Imagine Learning directly teaches vocabulary before it is seen in a reading context. Imagine Learning also uses principles of direct, contextualized instruction to provide students with a rich learning environment for oral language development. Reading comprehension strategies are taught explicitly; students encounter modeling and practice activities that teach how to find the main idea, answer literal questions, make inferences, and map story elements. After these strategies are explicitly taught, they are reviewed in practice activities where students use the skills they have learned.
Differentiated Instruction	Differentiated instruction is a proactive approach to teaching in which the curriculum is adapted to individual students' abilities, learning styles, or interests. Ideally, students' individual readiness should be taken into consideration when selecting curriculum. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) propose that "technology should be used to address varied learner needs and to assist the teacher in keeping track of student growth toward important curricular goals" (p. 9).	Imagine Learning automatically differentiates instruction for every student. It recognizes if students need remediation or if they can be placed on an accelerated learning path. Curriculum is automatically adjusted to ensure students are provided with the content they need for measurable growth. This removes much of the pressure from teachers to differentiate instruction for their diverse classes.
High Level of Engagement	Jensen (2005) describes engagement as being cognitively focused on learning. However, higher levels of engagement require higher energy levels, and to many students, the effort is not worth the price if they do not see the learning as relevant and meaningful (Jensen, 2005). Additionally, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) explain that while motivation is crucial to learning, maintaining motivation is difficult. Loss of motivation can lead to reading problems as students move into adolescence and adulthood.	Imagine Learning is a supplemental educational software program that provides core reading and language instruction through engaging activities, thus motivating students and encouraging lifelong learning. In a recent survey of Utah educators, more than 90 percent agreed that their students enjoy spending time on Imagine Learning. The program uses multiple modalities and employs high-quality art, video, and music, as well as chants and games to keep young students involved. Students are constantly interacting with the program, and the texts, characters, and stories are age-appropriate for young learners. This high level of engagement ensures that students remember what they have learned so they can use their newly acquired skills in all content areas and on exams.
Academic Vocabulary	In his research on academic vocabulary development, Marzano (2010) cites	Imagine Learning teaches important basic words as well as academic vocabulary words as

Key Instructional Strategies for K–3		
Practices	Research	Imagine Learning Support
	vocabulary knowledge as a significant indicator of academic success. Students with an insufficient vocabulary, including many English learners and children from low-income families, are likely to have difficulty in all academic areas. However, simply providing a list of words to memorize is not enough to help students increase their academic vocabulary. For children who are learning English, "using real and virtual experiences and visuals to introduce vocabulary" is critical (Cunningham, 2009, p. 86). Students increase their academic success as they learn the right words taught in a rich, contextualized teaching environment.	identified by Marzano (2010). The program explicitly teaches words needed to navigate a classroom environment, helping students perform better in the classroom and on standardized tests. To prepare students to encounter new words, Imagine Learning teaches affixes, as well as skills like blending word parts and understanding multi-meaning words. With Imagine Learning, vocabulary is not taught in isolation. Strategic videos introduce new words while the meaning is demonstrated in context. Each word is explained with three different videos or images to further enrich the student's understanding. When appropriate, academic vocabulary words, such as science terms, are shown in a school context to help students connect Imagine Learning content with classroom experiences. The program also uses meaningful repetition to help students acquire new vocabulary more quickly. Videos, animations, interactive text, text with audio, and activities are all formats through which students have multiple and varied experiences with new words.
Adaptive, Dynamic Sequence and Assessment	In order for assessment to both guide instruction and check for understanding after content has been presented, it must be ongoing (Dunkel, 1999).	By seamlessly integrating activities and assessment throughout the program, Imagine Learning ensures that assessment results guide future instruction. For example, while students focus on completing a fun activity, Imagine Learning collects data about students' mastery of new concepts for both formative and summative purposes. Also, Lessons can be streamlined if a student is progressing successfully or expanded if a student is struggling.
Scaffolding and First-Language Support	Scaffolding, modeling, and direct instruction are all English language development strategies that support English learners as they both acquire English and learn academic subjects (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). Additionally, languages have common sounds, and teachers can use sounds from a student's first language to build phonological awareness and oral language skills in English. For example, "teachers who have background knowledge about Spanish, as well as the factors that influence students' language and literacy development in English, have more tools to effectively scaffold instruction for Spanish-speaking	Imagine Learning uses scaffolding, modeling, and first- and second-language commonalities to help students master English. The curriculum includes first-language support for K–3 students who are also English learners, translating instructions and explanations into the students' first languages if necessary. The program currently supports English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Hmong, Vietnamese, Russian, French, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, and Marshallese. More languages are added regularly.

Key Instructional Strategies for K-3		
Practices	Research	Imagine Learning Support
	students" (Helman, 2004, p. 452).	

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